

## Planning and Secretary's Report to the 2018 AGM

The following report gives an overview of the range of issues (in no particular order) with which we have been involved during the past year. Some have taken up significantly more time than others, all have involved liaison with other parties and we are particularly indebted to our local borough councillors who fight tirelessly on behalf of local residents and with whom we are in frequent contact over all these issues.

**Local Plan** – this was approved by MBC in September – such is the level of dissatisfaction that call in requests on a variety of aspects were made by Helen Whately MP, CPRE South East Region, and also Headcorn Parish Council – see the comment below on Woodcut Farm.

**Parade of shops on Bearsted Green** – following a long gap since MBC rejected the landlord's second application (the first one having been withdrawn) to demolish the building and rebuild with flats above we were, of course, absolutely delighted to hear that the Crouch family have bought the building. This means the businesses will be able to remain. We would urge local people and those further afield to make sure that the fight was worth it and support the businesses as much as possible.

**Housing at Barty Farm** – a revised planning application is out for consultation and the Society will be submitting comments. We will keep members advised. In the meantime, Bearsted Parish Council will be considering this application at its Planning Committee meeting on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> June at 7.30 p.m. at Madginford Hall which you might like to attend.

**Land between Cross Keys and Sutton Street, known locally as 'Lilk Meadow'** – you will no doubt have seen works going on over the past few months. Cllr Val Springett is following events here very closely.

**Woodcut Farm at J8** – The latest application was approved in November, with the Planning Inquiry on the previous application in abeyance pending CPRE's request for a Judicial Review into the inclusion of J8 in the Local Plan. The Society provided research assistance to CPRE for this but, unfortunately, the request was unsuccessful and so, despite the sustained best efforts over many years of residents to the east of Maidstone and CPRE, this development is highly likely to go ahead.

**Binbury Park (west of the A249)** – the Society was involved last year in talks arranged by the Joint Parishes Group with Quinn Estates. A detailed planning application is awaited. A public meeting is being planned between Quinn Estates and Thurnham Parish Council. We will keep you informed.

**Virgin Media** – the summer of 2017 saw much activity by Virgin Media's contractors around Bearsted. The Society worked with Thurnham Parish Councillor, John Horne, and one of our members to put pressure on KCC to ensure that health and safety requirements were properly met and that reinstatement works were completed to the required standard. We remain disappointed that the high levels of supervision have not been sustained, enabling the contractors to revert to previous unsatisfactory working methods. We submitted an FOI request to KCC regarding meetings held with Virgin Media prior to the commencement of work in Bearsted. The response was extremely disappointing.

**Ashford Road area around the shops** – current Society member and former Bearsted Parish Council chairman, Graham Norton, approached the committee in September for help to clean up the area around the Ashford Road shops. He had already discussed the matter with KCC

Highways and the Bearsted parish clerk. The parish helped by supplying insurance cover, litter pickers and high visibility jackets. A plan was agreed and, following an email out to members, a working party was formed for Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> October. Weeding, litter collection and general tidying up were undertaken. No fewer than twenty bags of litter were collected! Since then Graham has been doing a weekly litter pick of the area and has drawn up a list of volunteers to help on an occasional basis. He has approached KCC Highways for further assistance in roadside improvements and the local surveyor has been helpful and constructive given ever decreasing resources. The following improvements have been made:-

- Helpful staff at the BP garage agreed to move the 'Coffee' sign to improve the visibility splay.
- Similarly Tesco repositioned their signage.
- Longstanding blocked drainage gullies by Tesco and beyond have been cleared to alleviate localised storm flooding
- the entrance to the petrol pumps has been tarmacked,
- and the pot hole outside Wards Estate Agent filled by KCC Highways

A key part of the project is an extension to the pavement outside the estate agent, Your Move, inclusive of dropped kerb and tactile paving for which he arranged the production of an engineering drawing. Assistance from the Parish Council has been sought for this in view of the current disruption to pedestrians who cannot use the pavement due to cars parking right up against the window of the estate agent thus totally blocking the pedestrians. However, to date the parish see the matter to be dealt with by Kent Highways. We need continuing pressure from the community to break this log jam.

The Society, has obtained an undertaking from Royal Mail to paint the scruffy post box which apparently had been missed from the maintenance schedule in 2016.

We thank Graham for initiating this project to enhance this part of Bearsted and will continue to support his endeavours where possible.

**Bearsted Green library** – you will be aware that the library is now housed in the Stationmaster's House in Ware Street. The Society supports appropriate redevelopment of the former library building and master's house, and has recently been involved in talks with KCC, arranged by Cllr Denis Spooner, at which some early plans were discussed. Further detailed plans are awaited from KCC. We will keep you informed.

**Yonder Cottage, St. Faith's Lane** – work has commenced on a new larger property, on which we commented, and we understand that the new owners are interacting well with existing residents.

**St. Faith's Bungalow, St. Faith's Lane** – the latest appeal for demolition of the existing bungalow and building of two new three-storey four bedroom houses was dismissed by the Planning Inspectorate in September, the main issue being the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the area. We understand that the bungalow is currently up for sale.

**Frimley Cottage, Tower Lane** – the Society objected to this latest planning application, particularly since access to the new property would be from St. Faith's Lane. The Society has been assisting local residents and we are pleased to report that the application has just been turned down by MBC's planning officers.

**8 Shirley Way** – responding to a request from neighbours regarding an extremely large extension which would have been out of keeping with all other properties in the road we submitted comments to MBC and, following Cllr Val Springett’s request for the application to be heard by the Planning Committee, it was refused.

**29 Landway** – we have recently been contacted about this property and asked the appropriate authority to assist

**164 Ashford Road** - the building has been demolished which has significantly reduced the antisocial behaviour and danger of fire and injury. The owners have applied for retrospective planning on a number of the conditions set by MBC’s planning committee as the demolition occurred in advance of the agreed conditions, in particular the upgrading of the access which was said in the planning documents to be required for demolition to occur, but has not yet taken place.

**HGVs diverting from the M20 through Bearsted** – we were made aware of this problem, publicised it, and encouraged residents to contact the Highways Agency. One of our committee members carried out a survey which revealed no fewer than 100 lorries thundering along the Ashford Road between 10 and 10.30 p.m. one night. Our borough councillors have been working hard with the Lorry Watch programme and our MP. You may well have seen Cllr Val Springett’s successful campaign to progress this on the front page of this month’s Downs Mail.

**Southern Relief Road** – the Society attended a public meeting held at the Great Danes Hotel on 2<sup>nd</sup> November and heard a number of residents from the area around Leeds, Langley, Sutton Valence and Willington Street angry at the increasing amount of house building to the east and southeast of the borough with scant regard for supporting infrastructure. Much air time was also consumed by KCC blaming MBC for including so many houses in the Local Plan, and MBC trying to defend the indefensible. Both Maidstone MPs were on the panel and endeavoured to calm things down by offering to arrange a meeting between the two leaders. Subsequent attempts have been widely reported in the press but the fundamental problem is that there is currently no money available to pay for such a road, without even further enabling development. Any such road would clearly have an effect on traffic within Bearsted but the Society awaits any detailed plans prior to making public comment.

**White Horse Wood** – we were advised at very short notice that a meeting in St. Mary’s Church had been called recently by Kent Woodland Employment Service. Community support was being sought for an application for funding to the Heritage Lottery Fund to provide training and maintenance work in the White Horse Wood Country Park. Further details are awaited before the Society takes a view.

**FOI requests** – in addition to those mentioned above requests were also submitted to:-

- **MBC** seeking details of the number of offices converted to residential units, and also the North Kent Enterprise Zone, including its history, composition and likely impact. A follow up request is under consideration.
- **the Planning Inspectorate** seeking copies of notes taken during the Local Plan hearings supplied to the inspector. We were disappointed to learn that comprehensive coverage both in written form and by way of MBC’s webcast facilities was not available.

## Information emails

- **Numerous road closures** – mainly, although not all, due to reinstatement works following Virgin Media's activities
- **Rubbish collection** following inclement weather
- Consultation on **Taxi & Hackney carriages** in Maidstone
- Consultation on **Southeastern trains**
- **Theatrical performances** in Detling and Thurnham
- **Marks & Spencer** exhibition
- **Park & Ride at Willington Street, also Maidstone car park charges**

**Input to Co-ordinating Team** - we have provided assistance to letters sent by the Co-ordinating Team to the borough council on the following topics amongst others:-

- Planning Referral Process review
- First Review of Local Plan
- London Plan – impact of outwards migration
- Local Plan – lessons learnt workshop in April 2018
- National Planning Policy Framework – recent consultation

**GDPR and Website** - we are indebted to retired planning consultant, Chris Buckingham, for immersing himself in ensuring the Society was ready for the new GDPR which came into effect on 25<sup>th</sup> May. You will have noticed that recent emails from the Society are arriving via MailChimp, also set up by Chris, which is going to make your Secretary's life enormously easier.

As with any new project, despite prior testing, some problems have occurred. These are being addressed. Please be assured that the privacy of your contact details is really important to us. If anything, we have probably gone completely over the top to ensure compliance with the new legislation so, please bear with us .....!!!

Chris has also kindly agreed to address the website content on an ongoing basis and so we hope you will notice a more up to date service in the future.

Chris Bentley has once again offered invaluable service, sometimes at very short notice, to the Society with technical assistance regarding the website and email system over the year which has been greatly appreciated.

In conclusion I would like to thank everyone who has supported the Society this year.

Mary Richards  
Secretary  
Bearsted & Thurnham Society  
June 2018